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WEST ASHEVILLE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Interview with Thomas Young by Rob Neufeld and Sally vander Straeten at Mr. Young's house, July 22, 1991

Rob: You were talking about which gentleman?

Thomas: Mr. Harper of Harper and Atkins. He had the lumber yard down here, the old fellow, and he had a little shack built back there, and a big pot-bellied stove. We used to have big story-tells, meet there, spin a lot of stories there, you know. He was a very interesting old man and a very lovely old man. Then Harry Atkins went into business there together. That's the Harper-Atkins lumber company that was founded there.

Rob: This pot-bellied stove was inside his office?

Thomas: In his little office there, yes.

Rob: How many people could fit inside his office?

Thomas: About six of us that could get around that pot-bellied stove, I guess.

Rob: Who was the regular crowd?

Thomas: Some of them I didn't know. I don't remember off hand, but it'd be the older set. Oh--Old Man Fortune, he was a railroad man.

Rob: That's Albert Fortune's father.

Thomas: That's right. He is in one of those pictures there.

Rob: When did you go down there--was it after work you went?

Thomas: After work I'd go down there and anytime that I was off. And we'd chat with him. Balfour Brookshire--his daddy was a doctor, Dr. Brookshire--he was a good friend; and Dr. Otis; and Zeb Painter over here, my neighbor, he was one of the old-timers here. I guess he was one of the first people that [moved into this neighborhood]. When we moved here, there were only about four houses right in around here. The rest of them were built since. And he was a carpenter and architect for a lot of them. Then the Bradleys next door, they raised their families here, and the Hiltons up there, they built the house at 4. Then the St. Joan of Arc School's over here, and old Father Leo, he was the starter of that. I had an open house on Christmas for egg nog. All my neighbors were invited in for egg nog. Old Father Leo, he'd be in for his egg nog. He was a grand old man. I thought the world of him. I'm not a Catholic, and he never mentioned church to me or anything, but just a good neighbor old Father Leo was. Grand old man. Of course, the Bells, they moved down here. Raymond Bell. The Vineses were also on this street. That's Pete's folks, the boy that pulled a gun on a policmen, and it

As was printed in The Local Paper At This Time.

failed to fire. That's the only thing that kept him from killing a policeman down here. He and I had a run-in once. You couldn't control Pete too well. He was a likeable kid, I don't know, but just wild, that's all. His folks were awfully nice folks.

Rob: How old is Pete now?

Thomas: I don't know, I haven't heard from them. They moved away.

Rob: When did he pull the gun?

Thomas: It was back around '37 or '38. That was a little old park down there where Burger King [was built]. It belonged to the city.

Sally: They had a city park down there?

Thomas: It was a little park given to the city. I don't know how Mr. Colman, the developer, got it from the city. Right where the Burger King sits now, that was a big spring back in there. Nice water, and they found an alligator in there. They didn't know how it got there unless somebody from Florida brought it up and turned it loose.

Rob: Now, these folks that you mentioned, they were all neighbors and friends?

Thomas: All neighbors and friends, yes.

Rob: Not all of them got together at the lumber yard, did they?

Thomas: Oh no, not all of them. It was just a gathering place for the old-timers.

Rob: Did you share drink and food when you went to the lumber yard?

Thomas: They had a cold drink place in there at that time.

Rob: You mean like a cold drink machine or a fountain?

Thomas: Well, Beamon Pénner of Pénner's Drug Store, moved from over where the YMCA is there, the corner of Walnut and Rankin. He had a drug store and then he moved and bought this over here. His father-in-law was a railroad man--Old Man Chester. I've filled prescriptions for them there. That's in later years, of course, but old man Chester would sit on the drink box back there, and he'd spiel off stories on the railroad. He's an old great railroader, and he'd tell great stories.

Rob: Do you remember any of the stories?

Thomas: No, not offhand, but he and Frank Mulvaney, who later became mayor, you know, they were great friends. He's a railroad man, too--Frank Mulvaney. His nephew, Jack Mulvaney, married Pit Sluder's niece, who rented from us there, when the wife first built that building up there. They rented one end of the building. They got married and they went to move down to Spartanburg. Right on up to when the wife died--she passed away last Christmas--we'd always get Christmas cards from him. They rented rooms, until they built a home on Sand Hill Road.

Rob: Could you tell us a little bit about yourself and your wife and your folks and her folks, where you all come from?

Thomas: Have you got a picture there of that family in Missouri?

Sally: Yes, I do have that picture. This, "Out of the past--photographs of old Marcelene."

Thomas: That little woman on her father's knee there is my wife. She stubbed her toe and she got that shoe off, you notice. They were old pioneers out there. That whole county out there is related to her. That young boy down on the end there, he had his ...nine boys and himself raised there, and they've all married and that whole county is just about folks.

Rob: And it's still Marcelene, Missouri.

Thomas: She was a beauty queen from there. She was about sixteen years old when she was beauty queen.

Rob: How did you meet her?

Thomas: I met her in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She was in charge of the beauty shop at Brown-Dunkins (?) in Tulsa. I managed a drug store for Steinbergs, which was bought out by the Crown Drug Company. That's where I met her.

Rob: So she ran a business and she decided to locate in Tulsa?

Thomas: She was a manager of beauty shops. She took a course in Chicago. She worked for Frankels out of Boston. They sent for her to come to Boston to take care of that seventy-five operators' shop in Boston. I missed her very much so I'd call her on the phone; and she would call me. She said, "I believe I can get transferred from here because I don't like it in Boston at all. They told me that I could find a place at Elmira, New York or at Asheville, North Carolina." I said, "Well, honey, you get to the one in Asheville, North Carolina, and I'll be there the next day." She did and came here and took over the old Bon Marche Beauty Shop.

Rob: So while you were meeting all the people at Eckerd's and then at your place, she was getting to meet quite a few people at her beauty shop. Together, you all knew quite a few people.

Thomas: Oh, yes. Bob Reynolds' little daughter, the heiress of the Hope diamond--that letter there is from Bob.

Sally: Yes, I saw that about you sending a little birthday present to her.

Thomas: She visited us here and thought a lot of us. And we were always invited up to Bob's up on the mountain there. He was a very influential man. He was Chairman of the Armed Services Committee, you know.

Sally: He was a Senator, right?

Thomas: Senator--Senator Bob.

Rob: What was his home town?

Thomas: Asheville. He owned Reynolds Mountain up there. That's how it got it's name.

Rob: He was very influential locally as well as at the State level?

Thomas: They called him "Our Bob." Bob was a very popular man. I made him lamps. I started to work in woodwork. I'd get mahogany. That's where I'd get my connection from old man Harper. They'd import foreign timber in and I'd get mahognay from Argentina and Brazil, and bola wood and ebony. I used to work in all of those. I'd do inlay work.

Rob: While you were a pharmacist?

Thomas: Oh, yes. That was just a hobby of mine and I made those lamps for him.

Sally: Where is some of your other work?

Thomas: When we moved here, honey, we didn't own a stick of furniture. The only thing we brought from Tulsa with us was an old Crosley 26" screen TV, and it's still in there in a room that I'll show you after a while. I went down to the furniture store and bought second-hand chairs and things, and strip them down and rebuild them, and she'd do the upholstery. She made every drape and all these, and I built the valences there--all the drapes in all the house, did it on an old white tread sewing machine, and that's how we got our furniture start. She was an industrious little person. When we got a chance, some of the neighbors

passed away, we'd buy their places. That's how come I've got six houses here, all of them right together.

Rob: You own six houses on Mitchell Avenue?

Thomas: All of them right here together. 6, 6½, 32, 38, 42, and 45, and 33 and 31 duplex. That's her building.

Sally: 33 and 31 is her building?

Thomas: 33 and 31. She built that while I was in the service.

Rob: Your wife built a house?

Thomas: She drew the blueprint to it and everything.

Rob: I wanted to make sure I was hearing that right.

Thomas: She was a wonderful person.

Rob: Let's back up one more time, then we'll go forward. What did your folks do?

Thomas: My dad was a doctor.

Rob: In Arkansas.

Rob: Did your folks have any dreams for you of what they wanted your life to be.

Thomas: Dad wanted me to be a surgeon, and I was gifted that way. But I went to medical school and looked around and saw these pharmacists finish up in three years and get out and own a home and all. Poor old doctors were having to get together to pay their office rent. Now, I knew what my poor old daddy had gone through when he started as a horse and buggy doctor. He was a family physician. I'd see him pry ~~them~~ him out of a saddle in that cold freezing weather back in the midwest and west. I said, none of it for me, so I just took up pharmacy.

Rob: What was it like being a pharmacist in those days as compared to now?

Thomas: Well, there's a picture there of my organization from Little Rock. I believe that's in '26, if I remember right. It was fourteen hours a day, and $35 a week was high wages. But, Lord, that was much better than what the poor old doctors back then were making. My dad used to take a lot of his pay in hams and bacon when they had the bad years--two banks went under. He had money in both of them. It wiped him out. The farmers would bring in this venison, sugar-cured smoked hams. Boy, I can smell them cooking right now. It's a wonderful, wonderful thing.

Those old Arkansawyers could really fix hams.

Rob: And how did you meet your wife? You never got around to telling us that.

Thomas: She'd come into the drug store with one of her operators to buy a cold drink, sit at the table. I was in the back. I saw her out there at the table and I went out by there to introduce myself to her. I used to not have any qualms about a thing like that. I've gotten toned down in my old age.

Rob: From that point on you hit it off?

Thomas: That's right.

Rob: Well, do you want to tell the young man who will eventually listen to this tape what your first line was?

Sally: What did you say to make her really pay attention to you and not the others?

Thomas: Oh, I walked up and introduced myself to [both women] and appreciated their coming by and....I made a date with her and that was it. Oh, I don't know. She had been married before, and that's why we didn't get married then because she hadn't got her divorce. When she got here, she got her divorce and she and I got married in Jackson County at Sylva. A Methodist was there and married us, and his wife was a witness and one of the neighbors had come in. We were married in the parsonage.

Sally: Did you have any trouble getting married at that time because she was divorced?

Thomas: No. He was glad to get the five dollars.

Rob: What were the first things you did upon arriving...Did You have a job set up before you came to Asheville?

Thomas: She was doing civic work and things like that and got acquainted with all these people. And she spoke with some of them there, so I got a job at Eckerd's. You see that picture of Eckerd's there.

Sally: Right, I sure do.

Thomas: I got a job there, $35 a week. I left a job in Tulsa, $75 a week. And I stayed at the Battery Park and she stayed at Mrs. Moore's apartments down at Woolsey Dip. Mrs. Moore had eight apartments there. She stayed there and I stayed elsewhere until we got married and we moved over here. We bought this house, and I've added three lots on this one piece of property here. I've got a bird sanctuary and all those trees back in

there.

Sally: Wow, that's wonderful.

Rob: When did you establish the bird sanctuary?

Thomas: It just about established itself. Of course, we fed the birds. We enjoyed them. We built feeders at the windows and we got an awful lot of pleasure out of them.

Rob: You've been in this place since the early thirties?

Thomas: I guess '33 or '34. At that time, there weren't any improvements on it at all. There's a front porch clear across and an old porch swing out there, and she got Mr. Painter over here. He was a carpenter and worked for a merchant in town. They built that front room and all. But Mr. Painter did all that carpentry work in there, and I closed that off, that was the dining room over there, and the servitor in there had a dumb waiter. I think they must have had their kitchen downstairs in the basement. They put [the food] on the servitor and serve out there in the dining room. And this was open here. The curtains were in it. I did away with that, closed it off, made an apartment over here, and we rented it to Miss Rice, who worked for one of the old Germans out at Enka. She was secretary to him. She was with us twelve years or better, and she got married. They bought their own place down on Landvale down here. She's the one I'm giving that place to that the wife built. They were just bosom friends, and they'd go on buying trips together to Chicago, the merchants' mart up there and all those places.

Rob: She's been in West Asheville a long time also.

Thomas: She's been here a long time.

Rob: Longer than you?

Thomas: No, about the same time, I guess. I asked her, when my wife passed away, I said, "She's the best friend you had, I guess. Would you mind doing my secretarial work for me?" She said, "I'd be glad to do it for you." So I just turned it over to her. I take care of the decision-making, and she does my secretarial work. She's been a wonderful help to me. I've got a good neighbor over here--Bill Osserman. I'm a funny person. I had a brother. He was a dresser. Boy, he had seventy-five suits of clothes or he was naked. Give me an old pair of jeans, and I'm just as happy as I can be. When she passed away--I never even had a suit that was decent for me to go to the funeral with. So that was the dilemma I was in. And Bill Osserman, a neighbor of mine here, said, "Don't let it worry you." About thirty minutes or so, here he comes with a new suit of clothes, just fit me and everything. That's the kind of neighbors I've got. Miss

Weddle Weddle

Margaret ~~Weddell~~ (?) up here owned Home Furniture up here. Paul Nichols is her son-in-law, you know. Paul lives up there now. Miss ~~Weddell~~'s still with him. But, Mr. ~~Weddell~~, I bought [from him] the lot on this end that the wife built the house on.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

Thomas: ...but it was a Baptist parsonage, and Nane Starnes was in it. He moved into it. And the old water tower had one leg over that whole property up there, and one of them back of that place that the wife built there. And it set on that, and I had a picture here somewhere of it. I stayed up all night looking for that. Miss Rice has gone because of some sickness in her family in Virginia. She's up there and won't be back til tonight. I've got so much stuff to look through. I looked through that box. I wouldn't get in her files because I'd mess them up.

Rob: Did your neighbors sell to you exclusively when their property was passed on?

Sally: They knew you wanted it?

Thomas: When my wife passed away? It was all in the will. She left a little will. We've had six beautiful dogs, all highly pedigreed, three German Shephards and three Samoyds. And I had a little German Shephard, she wasn't little, she weighed about 110 pounds, but she was just like a family.

Rob: Your wife owned all these properties, the six houses?

Thomas: They were in both our names, we had it fixed that way. We had a joint bank account and property was bought in both of our names. But, the little fellow died of Alzheimer's. For eleven years, I sat by her bedside, took care of her. I cooked every meal that little fellow ate and took care of her all that time. It first started with low blood sugar and then it developed into this. I would stay there and bring her meals. One time I broke my ankle. The ice was slick. I went down to get her an exercising bicycle. I had that for her to keep her toned up. The driveway was frozen over, and I slipped and broke that ankle, fell on it. It was zero weather out there. And I was by myself right down this driveway with that bicycle, trying to get it up to the house. I got that foot out from under me. I looked down. One of the bones was sticking up about like that. I sat there in that cold and set that ankle back, and crawled up the steps up the back and got the door open. I knew where I had some elastic bandages. I got to those, wrapped it up, got me a crutch that the government gave me, a pair of crutches, and I never went to bed with that or anything, and I was able to walk on it, but it took about seven weeks. But I kept every meal. She never missed a meal.

Rob: That's an amazing story.

Thomas: But, Lord God, I'd do it a thousand times. A wonderful person.

Rob: Tell us, Mr. Young, when you first came to Asheville, which was in 1930, what was it like? Your memories must be pretty clear because you were entering a new town, you were getting established in a new job. What were your earliest impressions?

Thomas: I'd been through here. I got into World War I before peace was signed in the Navy, and I'd come through Asheville, and I saw these old mountains, and I liked them. They were very much like the Ozarks. That's when I told her, you take Asheville and I'll be there--because I knew what it was here, the climate and all. At that time, it was a health resort. They treated tuberculosis here. Then World War II broke out. I'd been in the service four years in the Navy, and I'd had all that medical experience and everything, too, so that's why I set my own foot. I never knew what it was to have a doctor. Doctor friends, I had lots of them. Dr. McCalvin visits me just every month or so. And if he's in Europe or anything, I always get a letter or a card from him.

Sally: Just what was Asheville like? It was beautiful with the mountains, health resorts...

Thomas: We took over Grove Park Inn for the Navy. I was in the crew that took it over. Dick Harlowe was the coach from Harvard. He was the captain up there. I had the pharmacy end of it there. One of the boys here--Hall from West Asheville, Alan Hall, his brother had come by the other day here, just about a week or so ago. He'd come by and knocked on the door. He had a VFW cap on and he says, "Do you know a T.F. Young who used to live here, and does he live here?" I said, "You're talking to him." He said, "My name's Hall. I've got a picture here that I think you might be interested in." He showed me that picture. I made a copy of it, and you've got one, too, of all the men in Navy uniform. Alan Hall was the yeoman up there, and he did all the office work. That's taken up at the Grove Park Inn. We took it over. Then I got orders from Washington to take over Appalachian Hall out here from the two doctors there for the naval hospital. So they transferred me over to that job there then.

Rob: Your first job was at Eckerd's. That was in 1930. How long were you there?

Thomas: Oh, I was there I guess a couple of years.

Rob: What position did you have there?

Thomas: Well, it was a big gathering place for everybody. They

had lucnhes, You could see what a crew they had in that little store. They served meals. S&W was the only competition we had down there. The men's store directly across the street, those fellows all came in there for meals. People in the courthouse would come up there for food. It was just a gathering place for all of them. We'd meet a lot of folks there that you wouldn't otherwise.

Sally: And then did they get their prescriptions filled?

Thomas: Oh yes, they got their prescriptions filled.

Rob: Were you the lone pharmacist?

Thomas: No, there were three of us. Bollinger and I were there at the same time. And Tatum--Bearfoot and Tatum started that store there. He and I were going to go into business over at Brevard, and we never did. He was from Brevard.

Rob: What is ~~Bearfoot~~ Barefoot and Tatum? (A Drug Store) Barefoot (Barefoot & Tatt Gr)

Thomas: That was down on the square. ~~Bearfoot~~ was his name; they're both pharmacists.

Rob: Did Tatum work at Eckerd's before he went to ~~Bearfoot~~ BARefoot and Tatum?

Thomas: Oh, yes. He and I and Bollinger were the pharmacists there then. Dick Young, he's the short fellow. I'm the only one in white trousers. That group--all of them passed away but "Smitty," the floor manager, and he lives out here in West Asheville. (PAUL SMITH)

Rob: What was a day like for you at Eckerd's.

Thomas: Well, all of the school kids would come in there after school was out, and I mean it was a noisy place. It was a regular meeting place for the kids.

Rob: How did they get there?

Thomas: They'd walk, some of them did. They didn't have school buses like they do now.

Rob: Are there any interesting stories about some of the regulars or some of the more noteworthy or even some of the more notorious people who came in?

Thomas: Uncle Georgie Gash, one of my best friends. He was the J.P. He had offices there on Vance Square. I'd go down there, like I did at old man Harper's, and sit around and he and I'd politic. And I.C. Crawford and all those boys. He was with Bob

Reynolds, I.C. was. They had offices together out there. Then, Coke Candler. I'd go down to the courthouse every now and then and see my old friend Coke Candler. I always worked behind the scenes in politics. I didn't like to get out in public. My part was behind the scenes.

Rob: Give me an exmaple. With George Gash, for instance, what kinds of things would you politic about? Did you agree all the time?

Thomas: The present thing that was coming up--you know, that was integration time, and all those things coming on, you know. We were both old South. My granddaddy was a four-year Confederate veteran, you know. He fought at the Battle of Shiloh up here with 1st Arkansas. We had lots of things to talk about at that time then.

Sally: How were relations between black and white when you got here?

Thomas: It wasn't too good. They had a little bit of trouble.

Sally: Would they have fights or what?

Thomas: Yes, just pushing around, like they start them on the streets. They would break out after a ball game or something, have little spats, but the police would take care of most of that.

Rob: Did you ever witness one?

Thomas: Not here like it was in Tulsa. We had had a big one back there that killed three hundred. My brother was in the railroad yard, where the most of it was. He was in his office behind his desk with a 45.

Rob: And what did that start over?

Thomas: It just kept building up and word got out that one of the Negroes had assaulted a white girl on an elevator there at Brown & Duncan (?) where my wife's beauty shop was. It started from that right out on the street. They'd get so, they'd arm up shoulder to shoulder, walk down the street, and make white people walk off of the street.

Rob: So they weren't as meek and mild as history says.

Thomas: They were riled up. They were just boiling for it. And that's when they started. It started down in the railroad yard. My brother was chief yard clerk.

Rob: Were they connected with the labor union as well or was it

just racial?

Thomas: It was racial. It was purely racial.

Rob: So, did you find the blacks here in Asheville and West Asheville meeker?

Thomas: Well, they seemed to be much different here from what they were back in Tulsa. That had gone on for several years. You know, Bill Murray, Governor Murray, he wrote the Constitution of Oklahoma. He did most of the writing of that. He planted corn on the Capitol building grounds. Farmer Bill Murray.

Rob: Very practical, I like that. I'll vote for him.

Thomas: At least he put it to some use. They struck oil on it then, and, by George, oil derricks went up all around the place.

Sally: I was just thinking--when you got here and you were trying to figure out what to do about these race relations in the thirties, what did you think was the best plan?

Thomas: I'm still like Abraham Lincoln. I think he's the best friend the South ever had. His idea was to send them all back to Africa and give them a start there in their own country. That was his idea. But they changed history somewhere down the road. They rewrote history and they're doing it every day now.

Rob: You should have been here like in 1670 and maybe you could have been more influential in that regard.

Sally: Were they trying to do anything when you were trying to figure out politicking, were they actually trying to do anything about that or were they just wondering?

Thomas: I don't know. All of them were against it but, by George, they just got spineless, I guess. You take--well, there in Oklahoma, Old Bill Murray was a rebel all the way through. You know, one of our presidents belonged to the Klan there. You couldn't guess who he was.

Rob: It's intriguing. You're intriguing me.

Thomas: He was one of our presidents, and he was the one that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima.

Rob: Okay, Truman.

Thomas: Old Harry Truman. He marched in a ten-mile parade from Oklahoma City. He was a Klansman.

Rob: Interesting. There was all this national activity, and

things were happening in Tulsa. And presidents were saying things. Did the black population in Asheville or West Asheville become more assertive in any way?

Thomas: Well, I don't know that they did too much here. It wasn't like it was back there. Chicago was as bad as any place I know of. I was there for a little while.

Sally: Were you talking to any of the colored people when you were politicking?

Thomas: Oh, yes, we have some awful good black people that think everybody ought to earn their keep regardless of if they are handicapped and all. You pull yourself up by your bootstrings. The Southern people had to. My own granddaddy was four years in the Confederate army and was wounded three times, but when he got back home, he didn't believe in slavery. My granddaddy Shaw didn't even own any slaves. They didn't have slaves around them. They did their own farming, and when they got back [from the war], the carpetbaggers and the freed slaves and the Yankees had burned everything they had to the ground. What livestock they had, they drove it off, and what they couldn't drive off, they killed. And he came back from the Confederate Army. He didn't have anything to start on. One of the neighbors had left a little bit of shelled corn. The first year, they issued it around among themselves, and my granddaddy got a handful of shelled corn. He pulled a plow, and my grandmother put that corn in the ground, and that's where they got their first start. And one of the neighbors happened to find a stray mule and they used it and swapped around until it got back. They had parched acorns for coffee. That's what they brought themselves up from, and they brought the blacks what was there with them just like they did themselves. A lot of the blacks were awfully good. They'd come in and do work and those who had their ten acres that the slavemasters had given them, they kept those and raised a lot of food. But then there was a certain bunch that this carpetbagger group would bring in there, and they put them in politics, and they took over all the political jobs. And some of them couldn't read and write. They'd make a cross.

Rob: By the 1930s, there were quite a few very enterprising and very rich outsiders in Asheville--Northerners, people from Charleston, all over. They had a great effect on the area.

Thomas: Oh, yes.

Rob: When you did your politicking, were there outsiders in your group or were you all mountain Southerners?

Thomas: No, even the mountain folks were divided. Some of them never went to the Confederate Army. They went to the North from here. All through Tennessee, you'll find them up through there.

They had Copperheads. My old granddaddy would sit and tell me stories. That battle of Shiloh--if you're ever down at that battleground, don't fail to see the pictures that that shows. Of course, it's not a true picture; it's narrated, you see. But, the 1st Arkansas was pinned down at the Sunken Road. They'd run out of ammunition and they had nothing but Bowie knives made out of crosscut saws and swords left. They started from that 1st Arkansas and fought until there was just a few of them left, and granddaddy was one of them. I think there were about seventy-eight of the bunch who had come through that.

Rob: You were really raised in this very Rebel tradition. Did that stay with you in your life in Asheville and West Asheville?

Thomas: When it comes to this...[Some black people] don't know how damn lucky they are in our country here. A fellow down here, a black man in Texas, says they should earn it and show that they're proud of it. If it hadn't been for shipping them over here...There was a profit to the sea captains to run those darn things. They sent them up north and they couldn't use them in the machinery up there because they hadn't been used to that kind of work, but they could use them on the farms. That's how come the South was all the slaves they had.

Rob: You know, we got on this topic because we were talking about the politicking that was going on at Eckerd's and other places.

Thomas: Yes, well, for instance, there was Frank P. Graham. That was a racial thing, and we defeated him on a racial thing. I was Willis Smith's campaign manager. I stuffed mailboxes all the way to the Tennessee line at midnight. I'm glad to get it [the racial issue] settled and get down to business, but I like to see them earn it. I don't believe you ought to give anybody anything. I think you ruin anybody, white or black, by saying that we owe you this, give you this.

Sally: One of the things I'm wondering is, when you were working in the drugstore, that's when you bought the house out here in West Asheville. How did you decide to settle in West Asheville?

Thomas: At that time, this was the prettiest building place in Asheville. We had no fog or anything out here. It would be so foggy over on the other side of the tunnel, that you couldn't see. They cut that darn gap through there and now we have the same darn climate they have there. It was awful healthy over here. The air was better.

Rob: By the gap, you mean the 1980 cut through the mountain?

Thomas: That cut through the mountain was what brought the weather we have here right now. Oh, we used to have some

Thomas: Oh, well, I added to it. Old Man Ball had a little store up here where all these buildings back in here were.

Rob: I'm trying to get a picture. Did you have half acre lots, and all of your chickens and your produce and everything were all squeezed into these half acre lots or did you spread out?

Thomas: That was all planted in corn in back of me.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2 AND END OF TAPING SESSION

2d interview with Thomas Young with assistant Mrs. Ollie Rice, by Rob Neufeld and Sally vander Straeten, August 29, 1991 and Thomas Young's house.

Rob: We covered a lot of material last time. Let's just key into two things. You moved into Asheville in 1930, is that correct?

Thomas: Correct.

Rob: And you moved to West Asheville when?

Thomas: About '32 I guess it was.

Rob: And you worked at Eckerd's in Asheville pretty much right from the start.

Thomas: That's right.

Rob: And then you moved to which pharmacies in West Asheville?

Thomas: In '32, I went to a pharmacy next to Giezentanner's out there, across from the Asheville Cleaning and Dyeing Company.

Rob: is that B&B?

Thomas: No, the B&B was West Asheville Pharmacy. Balfour Brookshire is just like a brother to me. Dr. Brookshire passed away and Balfour and Cotton Bishop went into partnership in the West Asheville Pharmacy. That's where they got the B&B Pharmacy, Bishop & Brookshire. Balfour is a pharmacist graduate, but Bishop took the Board by studying pharmacy--they called it the grandfather law like the doctors used to have. He and Chubby Engel(?) went over and took the Board and passed the Board by doing home studying on their drugs and pharmacopoeia.

Rob: Let me back up a little bit. Do you recall the pharmacies that you worked at when you moved from Eckerd's?

Thomas: The Merrimon Avenue Pharmacy.

Rob: In North Asheville.

Thomas: Yes, I guess it was, over past Woolsey Dip out there.

Rob: And after that you worked at a pharmacy in West Asheville?

Thomas: Beamon Penner's. He used to be on Market Street by the YMCA--Market and Woodfin. He moved his pharmacy into West Asheville. He's where the A&P store used to be down by Beacham Curve. The manager there built a new place next to where Beamon Penner's is there off of State Street, where State Street comes into Haywood Road. I stayed at Beamon Penner's quite a while.

Rob: When did you start with Beamon Penner?

Thomas: They still had the streetcar tracks in there.

Rob: So it was in the 30s.

Thomas: Yes, it was in the 30s.

Rob: Is the old Beamon Penner building still standing?

Thomas: It isn't now. It's been remodelled. Mike's Auto Parts went in where the A&P store was, so they're right there together. That building, they renovated everything. They've got a bunch of offices in it. And Beamon passed away. Beamon lived on Brucemont Circle, and he was a great leader in the American Legion, and he was on the school board and things like that. Beamon is a wonderful boy. His father-in-law, Old Man Chester, was a great old storyteller, and he worked for the Southern Pacific, and he'd tell you railroad stories. He was like our old friend Harper down there at the lumber company. He'd sit back on the drink stand and tell me stories while I was filling prescriptions.

Rob: We haven't been able to get in touch with the old railroad people. Frank Mulvaney is ailing right now and he's not able to talk with us. Of course, Stonewall Fortune is no longer around. So since so many of the old railroad folks told you stories, I'm wondering if you remember any of them. Do any of them stand out?

Thomas: No, I don't. It was just very interesting to me, though, because I was getting a lot of the history of things--about Chicken Town or Chicken Hill or whatever that is over there. The eating places they stopped at out at Azalea, the first stop, and the train wrecks they had. Certain fellows got killed on the accidents on the railroad.

Sally: What were they doing on the railroad?

Thomas: Mr. Chester, I think, was either the engineer or the fireman. Frank, I think he was chief yard clerk down here. Mr. Chester lived on Brucemont Circle. Another railroad man lived down on Dorchester there, next to the store, but I've forgotten his name.

Rob: Which store was this?

Thomas: At Penner's. My little wife, she left being the manager of Bon Marche Beauty Shop, and her and another lady went into partnership at a beauty shop down there, Lottie Lee Beauty Shop(?), over what is Luke Atkinson's Furniture Store now. That was upstairs above it. The Ideal Drug Store was across the street. The hardware store was owned by Albert Fortune and his father. His father was an old railroad man, and he got his leg taken off--that was one of the things I heard Chester and Frank talking about down there.

Sally: How had that happened?

Thomas: I don't recall just how it did happen, but I remember that was one of the things they did talk about--when Fortune lost his leg.

Rob: How many people worked on the railroad in this area?

Thomas: It was very much like Enka out here when Enka had come in. It was the largest payroll that we had in this section.

Rob: They had like a thousand people working on the railroad in this one area?

Thomas: Oh, I wouldn't say that.

Rob: And they were conductors, engineers...

Thomas: Conductors, engineers, firemen.

Rob: And some of them worked in the yard.

Thomas: Some of them worked in the yard, yes. An awful lot of them worked in the yard.

Rob: What happened in the yard?

Thomas: Frank was telling about most of that, about how they had to go in there and turn their engines around on this kind of a turntable.

Rob: Was this the biggest yard for miles around?

Thomas: I think it was the only one in North Carolina. Maybe Old Fort might have had one. Azalea was one of the switch stations out there.

Rob: So trains came from all directions and turned around.

Thomas: This was where they turned their trains around, the only place on the railroad where they could do that without going on the spurs and backing into them.

Sally: Were these mainly freight trains or were they passenger trains?

Thomas: They were both, passenger and freight trains. Most of it was freight train traffic through here at that time.

Rob: These railroad men would tell stories and you were a party to them. Did they like bragging?

Thomas: Oh, yes. All guys when they get together like a little of that.

Rob: Do you remember some of the brags? Who was the braggiest?

Thomas: Well, Mr. Chester did his part. (laughs)

Rob: What did he do, did he say, that others couldn't do?

Thomas: I believe he was fireman on the train if I'm not mistaken. They had a little wreck out at Azalea, and I heard him talking about that, but I don't recall the main part of it.

Sally: What happened when they had wrecks? How did they get the cars back on?

Thomas: They'd have to send for their wrecking crews, and the crews would come in on a special train that they had all equipped

with their force to come in and clean up.

Sally: They had a special clean-up crew because they had so many wrecks?

Thomas: Oh, yes. They'd bring them in. Now, Fortune could tell you more on that than anybody around.

Rob: But Fortune wasn't part of your group that met down at the lumber yard, was he?

Thomas: No.

Rob: So you might have heard stories that he didn't, but we can pass by that.

Thomas: Albert had the store most of the time then. The old man did a lot of fishing. He loved to go out camping and fishing. He was a great sportsman, too. You would never know he ever lost a leg.

Rob: Was there a lot of camping and fishing? People left West Asheville to do that, I guess.

Thomas: Oh, yes.

Rob: We heard this story about how this man worked at Enka, walked from Enka to his home in West Asheville, and sometimes on the way he was stopping to do some hunting.

Thomas: Well, that's possible. Because when we had come here, that Johnson Woods--all that's been developed out there--Tom Mosely lived just below the First Citizen's Bank up here. Tom Mosely had a big brick home right there, and then there were very few houses on that Johnson School Road. All of it was in woods all the way back. And that's all developed up into there. I've heard--Mr. Painter was telling me about it, and so was Mr. Chester. There's an old colored cemetery just down toward Vermont, down that section of West Asheville. That was all an old colored cemetery back in there, and some of the excavations even now, they have found where some of the graves are.

Sally: What would people hunt? What was in Johnson Woods?

Thomas: Oh, there was quail and rabbits and a lot of men had fox hounds, they'd run their fox hounds through those woods. This old farm down here on the other side of Patton Avenue--Jack Barfield, who used to work for T.C. Smith Company over on South Lexington Avenue, [and who] started the Pepsi-Cola Company, invested in buying some of that land up along there on that old farm. That used to be a great hunting place back in there for quail and so forth.

Rob: Which farm is this?

Thomas: A farm back in there, it used to be just an old farm place. The golfers used to use it to practice shots back in there.

Rob: Does the farm have a name?

Thomas: It had a name, but I've forgotten what it was.

Rob: Do you recall where it was exactly?

Thomas: Do you know where the Hilton is. That's part of the farm.

Rob: Does the farm exist now in part?

Thomas: No, it's an old farm. It's gone out a long time ago. They bought it up. Jack made a fortune off of that. So did Harry Blomberg. Those boys did good by buying that. And Harry's business is still up there on part of that property. And Jack bought on this side of the road, too. And I always wished I had had the money to do it myself. I had a good credit rating--my wife and I both. We went into the cosmetic business. I manufactured cosmetics, but I didn't have it in West Asheville. I had it over off Annendale and Charlotte Street. I had a building over there that I rented and I manufactured cosmetics.

Rob: Did you know Jack Barfield pretty well?

Thomas: I knew Jack well, yes. He was working at T.C. Smith when I was at Eckerd's.

Rob: So you knew him because you got together...

Thomas: In the drug business.

Rob: ...downtown.

Thomas: He was working there downtown.

Rob: Is he from West Asheville? Did he live up here?

Thomas: He lived here in West Asheville at that time, I'm sure....Mr. Chester and Mr. Painter down here, they were old-timers around here then. Painter built a lot of these old houses. He was a carpenter and contractor and he worked for Merchant. When Merchant went in business he went working for Merchant. They built the West Asheville Baptist Church over here. The old gent came by to get me and take me up into the steeple of that Baptist Church. He built that steeple, the one

that was struck by lightning that made the fire that burned the place down. When he was building it, he let me go up in that steeple and I could look out and see Enka up there. And I had one of my trees back here that I could climb up and see Enka. I want you folks to see. I had beautiful azaleas. I had a thousand dollars worth of it at that time. Then I've got four big trees in my backyard that I wouldn't take a million dollars apiece for. I guess one of them is four hundred years old. Maybe all of them are right in that neighborhood.

Rob: Is that one you used to climb still here?

Thomas: Yes, that's the one I used to climb. In fact, I climbed all of them. In fact, I planted these trees out in front here, those blue spruce. I had four of them out here. I had to cut these down on this side on account of my walkway went straight out, and I built [the new sidewalk] out there out of a little old wheelbarrow I've got down here, just me and my Irish buggy. We built that.

Sally: Tell me a little bit more about the trees. When they did the building, did anybody think about which trees they took down?

Thomas: Oh, not much. When you're building, you don't plan on how big a tree's going to be hardly. I put one of them out here in my front yard and now I've only got two and then they crowd a little bit. I want to take you folks back there and let you see. For over eleven years, I sat by the side of my little wife's bed back there. I didn't have time to do these things, and everything went to pieces. The house is run down and everything, so that why it's taken so much of my time now to try to get back into shape. People used to stop and see my rose beds. I had rose beds right over here where that building is. I'd go there and water those roses, and I put a garden hose across the street, just let it run on the street, and there wouldn't be two or three cars that would pass all the time I was watering that. That's how traffic has changed on that street. It would be worn out in one hour out there now.

Rob: What makes you think that the tree back here is four hundred years old?

Thomas: Because I cut two of them down here that were two hundred and fifty years old.

Rob: Same species tree?

Thomas: They were Spanish oaks.

Rob: You determined the age from the rings, and this tree back here is thicker than those.

Thomas: Oh, you'd make two of them. This used to be an old plantation. My deed goes back on this place to the plantation time, and that piece I bought from Mr. ~~Whett~~ie up there--he had the home furniture store down here, and his son-in-law, Paul Nichols, the bandleader that plays up at the Hilton there--I understand Paul's not in too good health now--their deed goes back to the old plantation. Old Man Handte's house in back of my little wife's place up there--that's one of the oldest houses around here. Old Man Handte ran a seed store where that Davis salvage place is. He had a seed store in there. And he manufactured peanut butter. He had a horse and buggy and he owned that white house that's back there that the Catholic Church has now. The Baptist Church, that was their parsonage for several years. But Old Man Handte would deliver his peanut butter in this horse and buggy. That's how he made his start.

Rob: That was his first business.

Thomas: Yes.

Rob: All he had on his buggy were jars of peanut butter.

Thomas: Now, I'll tell you. I have an idea he'd sell seeds and anything else he could, too. He was a good old friend of mine. I'd talk with him for hours.

Rob: Did he grow peanuts up here?

Thomas: No, he'd order them and then turn them into peanut butter, but the little place he'd use, I'll show you, is up behind where our place is there, and I'll show you the cement floor is still there and the wall is still there. And also the place where one of the water tower supports stood. The rest of them went back over toward Blue Ridge.

Rob: Tell us a little more about Old Man Handte.

Thomas: Well, he was a very interesting old man. He had parrots, all kinds of pets in there. He would always sample his peanut butter for you, if you wanted to sample his peanut butter. Oh, I could spend hours and hours talking of him. He's a wonderful neighbor. When the Baptist people took that over, Nane Starnes lived there. Nane's wife passed away just a few days ago. She was from Texas where my grandfather Shaw was an old Confederate veteran. He was a Baptist minister, and he helped found the East Texas Baptist convention down there in Paris, Texas. She had been in that church where my grandfather had pastored down there.

Rob: Do you want to know anything about Old Man Handte in particular, Sally?

Sally: Well, what other kind of animals did he have in his store beside the parrots?

Thomas: Parrots and budgies or whatever you call them.

Sally: Oh, those tiny parakeets.

Thomas: He had those and canaries. Oh, he loved his canaries. He had singing birds.

Sally: Would he sell them to people?

Thomas: Oh, yes. He was a salesman, too.

Rob: Was he older than you?

Thomas: Oh, I don't know where anybody was ever older than me. But yes he was quite a bit older than I was. Mr. ~~Whettle~~ and I would be about the same age. His wife's still alive up here--Margaret, and she's a wonderful woman, too.

Rob: What else did Old Man Handte do besides raising birds and making peanut butter?

Thomas: Well, that just about took most of his time up, [especially making] peanut butter because at that time most of it was done by hand.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1 OF 2D INTERVIEW

Thomas: Dan Foster's one of our old-timers. He used to have the pharmacy down there just above Mr. Handte, on the corner.

Sally: And what do you remember about him? What kind of a person was he?

Thomas: Oh, he was a wonderful man. He vouched for me in the Lions Club. He and I were awfully good friends. Dan was well-to-do. He purchased this piece of land out at Leicester and built him a nice big home out on the mountain out there. He passed away here some time back.

Sally: When people got money back then, what did they do with their money besides purchasing land?

Thomas: Just try to make a little bit more.

Rob: Did Old Man Handte, for instance, see peanut and birds as big business? Was he attempting to make a mint off of that or was it just a passion of his?

Thomas: Oh, it was just a fantasy, I guess. Well, he was making a profit off of it. His sister lived on Blue Ridge. She built a home down there.

Sally: Now, how about the plantation? Do you know anything about what the plantation was like?

Thomas: Well, it was a regular old southern plantation. I understand it was a relative of one of our presidents back then that had it. It seems to me like it was a Hayes.

Rob: What did they grow on the plantation?

Thomas: I guess they had a lot of grapes and nice big orchards.

Rob: Did they grow cotton, tobacco?

Thomas: Cotton--I have an idea that's what the main crop was back at that time--corn and cotton.

Sally: Do you know if they had slaves?

Thomas: I'm pretty sure they did because all of them did. The Wellses out there all had slaves, and their old cabins are still up out there.

Sally: Old slave cabins are up around some place?

Thomas: Oh, yes. Out in Leicester.

Rob: Do you know where in Leicester?

Thomas: You know where Green Valley Road turns off? You go right down Green Valley Road and right over to your left as you turn off there--all that was slave plantation, and the slave cabins are all still there.

Rob: Who owns that now?

Thomas: The Wellses, they still own it, part of it. All that section in there is Wellses, and they own Early Mountain.

Rob: Aside from the deed that you researched, are there remnants or...

Thomas: It's mentioned in one of my deeds.

OR: It's probably in the home place, but it's in the locked box, Mr. Young.

Thomas: I tell you, it had in it the clause, this land can only be sold to a person of the Caucasian race, and that's how old the

Thomas: Oh, yes. It was known back then as the skillet and the breadbasket of Buncombe County. They raised more food and stuff back there. And the turkey drivers from Tennessee and the hog drivers from Tennessee drove all their turkeys and hogs through there to Charleston, South Carolina to sell. And this was one of their stop-overs, out there at Leicester. And I had my drugstore, and I got water out of the spring out there that they'd stop by and camp. That was one of their camping grounds.

Rob: Which spring?

Thomas: Where my drugstore was.

Rob: Did that spring have a name?

Thomas: It's been covered up now by a well. I put a well out there and I put a pump in it.

Rob: Is the drugstore still standing?

Thomas: Oh, yes. It's not a drugstore anymore. I believe now it's one of these travelling commodes, what is it called?

Sally: Port-a-john?

Thomas: Yes, that what they are. Anyway, it's all the same brand. One of those places took over and they hire them out. It used to be a carpet place.

Sally: Where did you get the stone that you built it with.

Thomas: The Pattons built it. I rented it from the Pattons.

Sally: Do you know where the stones came from?

Thomas: No. They're river stones.

Rob: You were saying that there were some people who lived in West Asheville who also owned property out in Leicester? That was a common thing?

Thomas: Oh, yes. In fact, West Asheville has always been one of their big trading places.

Rob: So the Leicester farmers used West Asheville as a trading place?

Thomas: Yes, that's right.

Rob: Plus, the Leicester farmers might have had a city residence in West Asheville?

Thomas: There's a few of them, but not too many. They'd know West Asheville better than other parts of Asheville. They'd always have to come through West Asheville.

Rob: One of the things that we're discovering, but we're not yet sure about, is that there is an identity that people connect with the western part of the county that ties West Asheville to Leicester and Candler and Enka more than West Ashville to Asheville. In other words, Leicester people and Enka people may feel closer to West Asheville than West Asheville people would feel to Asheville people. Is that right?

Thomas: I'd say so, yes.

Rob: So I'm interested in those connections. Is there a West Buncombe identity?

OR: That's interesting.

Rob: What do you think? And if you think so, what could you tell me that would lead to that conclusion?

Thomas: Well, I know that all of my customers--when I moved out there to put a drugstore in, I had a counter put in to check the traffic on that road. There's more traffic on that main road than on any other road anywhere around here.

Sally: Leicester Highway, you mean?

Thomas: Yes. And these drugstores over in town were crowded for parking room. I decided that by moving out there, I'd have plenty of parking room for my customers. Some of them said, "That Old Doc Young is crazy, moved out there in a corn field." Well, it did look like a corn field when I put my drugstore in, but now that's all filled all the way out. It's like a shopping center all the way out now. Erwin went in. Of course, there's always been an Erwin there, but they didn't consider it. They took our high school away from us at Leicester and moved it there where it is now. They consolidated the schools there.

Rob: Did you stop working at Beamon Penner's when you established your own place out there in Leicester?

Thomas: Yes.

Rob: What year was that? The photo is 1958. Was that photo taken when you first moved in?

Thomas: Ollie rented from us when she was working at Enka, and she was with us for twelve years.

OR: This says '58.

Thomas: Oh, it must have been around '51.

OR: I would think so--'51 or '52.

Rob: Another story that we heard is that during the Depression people in West Asheville weren't hurting as much as they might have because there were a lot of gardens in West Asheville, but also because people had a lot of connections to farms out in Leicester. So people didn't starve because they grew their own food.

Thomas: I had chickens down here. All of my neighbors had chickens.

Rob: On this street here?

Thomas: Oh, yes.

Rob: Where did you keep them?

Thomas: My garage used to be my hen house. People used to come by and see how I had my chickens fixed. That was an old wooden building where the garage is, and down at this corner I had a little twelve by fourteen hole cut there; had my roosts in the back of it. And the chickens would come down through that hole, and I'd run them down to the side of the house. I put hoops down in the ground, covered them with chicken wire, run it down along the wall, and under my steps, and all the way back to where my azalea place is up there. And I had a pen up there for them to feed in. They'd come around all that way, and people would come and watch them.

Rob: So while most people were raising chickens, Old Man Handte was raising budgies and parrots.

Thomas: And selling chicken feed.

Rob: Did people think he was a little eccentric?

Thomas: I think we were all eccentric back then.

Rob: That brings out a question. You worked at Beamon Penner's from the mid 30s to the early 1950s. Did you have many opportunities to get to know the people who came into the store?

Thomas: Oh, yes.

Rob: How did that work?

Thomas: It was like it was there at Beamon's. That's where I

met Frank Mulvaney. There I was filling prescriptions more than anything else. Penner wasn't registered, you see, and I was a registered pharmacist. I didn't get to meet as many people. I could remember their names. Frank and Mr. Chester, they were always there; they wanted to come in and talk. Frank would be coming in from his work and he'd stop by, and they all traded there, of course. That's where I got acquainted with them. Mr. ~~Camel~~ Mpbell, the manager of A&P store down there, he was one of our good customers. And they wouldn't put in drugs there in competition to the drugstore because it was right there on the same corner. He was an awfully good man, and he didn't want to hurt Beamon Penner that way. So he just wouldn't put in any drugs or things of that type. And we wouldn't put any grocery stuff in. We 'd stick strictly to drugs there and cosmetics and things.

OR: Mr. Young has always been a real friendly person and he could meet people easily. Out here at Leicester, he had all of Madison County trading with you, didn't you?

Thomas: Oh, my Lord, up to the Tennessee line up there. Hot Springs would come through, all these other places that would come to Asheville would leave their bottles there with me and go to see their doctor. And the doctor would call them in to me back out there. I had an awful lot of customers from Hot Springs.

Sally: The woman who's the head of the West Asheville Business Association now is from Madison County.

Rob: Bonnie Hickey.

Sally: She grew up in Madison County, she told us, on a farm there. I was wondering if it was kind of isolated up there or if people from Madison County came to Asheville.

Thomas: We were very clannish. You have a customer out there and they're loyal to you. How many people would come by, leave their prescriptions, go see theier doctor, and then have the doctor call me back? There are just not many that would stick with a person like that.

Rob: Tell us a little more about how you met Frank Mulvaney.

Thomas: I believe the little wife met Frank and knew him before I did because she was always in politics and Frank was in politics, too, you know. In fact, she probably introduced me to Frank. Anyway, his nephew was the first renter up here of the apartment on that end over there, and he lived down on Sand Hill Road--Jack Mulvaney. He married Pit Sluder's niece, and they're in Spartanburg, South Carolina. She was a school teacher here in Asheville. But she had the apartment first, and then she and

Jack got married at the St. Joan of Arc Church. Frank belonged up here to the St. Joan of Arc Church. The old priest up there--Father Leo--he'd come down to have egg nog with me every Christmas. He was a grand old priest. I loved him.

Rob: Was politics one of the things that people talked about in the drugstore?

Thomas: Yes, because I did a lot of undercover work for politics. I worked behind the scenes.

Rob: So, one of the reasons you developed friends there was because they found common cause.

Thomas: That's right. I. Beverly Lake was as good a friend as I ever had. He was in law school down at Wake Forest. I was his campaign manager here in Asheville. Of course. I met a lot of people then. In fact, that State's Rights Party was organized [when] a hundred counties signed petitions to have a party set up, and I went over and got the names of every one of them that signed petitions. I went over and spent three days in Raleigh copying them. I got them all; I've got it down here in the basement. That's history. I had contacts with all of these hundred counties. Therefore, that's why I can work better behind scnes than any other place because I know so many people in politics.

Rob: How many people from West Asheville and Leicester and Enka signed that petition?

Thomas: I'd say, most of them did. Regardless, Democrats and Republicans both signed that petition.

Rob: And what year was that?

Thomas: When did I. Beverly Lake run for Governor here?

OR: Mrs. Young and I went over to Battery Park for breakfast one morning. It was in the fifties, wasn't it?

Rob: What were the big issues at that time and were there some local issues?

Thomas: It was more liberals against conservatives. That's the main object of it. At that time, we had so many of these liberal organizations around here. Colonel Putnam and I had the records of most of the darn Communists sympathizers here anywhere in the country. He had his offices above the Plaza Theatre. And he lived over in Biltmore Forest. He had his safe over there with all these names in it that we'd collected on these liberal sympathizers.

Sally: How did you get the names?

Thomas: Like, I worked behind cover.

Sally: So you kind of found them out?

Thomas: We did. And Putnam had a record on all of them, too. They broke into his safe up there and tore up his office and everything.

Rob: When was that?

Thomas: That was back in about 1941 or 2.

Rob: Oh, that early.

Thomas: That early.

Rob: So he was starting to collect these things before McCarthy was doing it on a national level.

Thomas: Well, McCarthy was very active at that time. Edgar Hoover was, too. I've got letters from Edgar back there thanking me for some work I did for him.

Rob: Who was the worst of the sympathizers from your point of view?

Thomas: Well, I wouldn't name any names now because it may hurt some good families.

Rob: Can you speak in general without revealing names about what kinds of things they were doing in the community? Was this something that applied to the community, or was it more on a state or national level? It sounds like you were involved in things that went way beyond the community.

Thomas: This is a very conservative community. We had independent Democrats. We called them Independent Democrats. I had friends that were high in the party. My dad was a Democrat and my granddaddy was a Democrat. We've all been Democrats all the way back. I've been registered ever since I was twenty-one years old as a Democrat. But, I'm an Independent Democrat. If I think a man's better to help my country, my country goes before--my country is the next thing to God to me. If I think a man is going to help my country more, I'm voting for him regardless if he run on any kind of ticket.

Sally: So, when people were talking about being conservative back then, what they were saying was, they really wanted to keep the traditions of the country going.

Thomas: That's right--the old traditions of the country. Too much change and too fast a change, we didn't like it. And, boy, we've gone headlong now.

Rob: And would you say that West Asheville was at that time a pretty conservative place?

Thomas: We've always been conservative. It's just like--one of the paperboys was out here, and I told him that we don't want nothing in the world to happen to the Asheville Citizen-Times. He said, "Why is that?" I said, "We wouldn't know how to vote out here. We always vote against the paper, and we know we're voting right." (laughs)

Rob: Was Colonel Putnam a military colonel?

Thomas: Yes. He was a very smart man.

Rob: Is he an Asheville native?

Thomas: I believe he was a South Carolinian, I'm not sure.

Rob: So he settled here for some reason. For business?

Thomas: He was a lawyer. And, of course, I. Beverly lake taught out at Wake Forest and Robert Morgan was Attorney General of the State. He's had many a lunch out here at my house. He and I worked together for I. Beverly Lake. He had come here to meet with me on it. When I first met Robert, I couldn't realize, I thought he was just a little boy. He's short, you know, only about five foot two, I guess. He's a smart little rascal. He knew law, and he was one of I. Beverly Lake's students. So, he worked for I. Beverly Lake.

Rob: Mr. Young, could you say if there were any States' Rights issues that applied very closely to what was going on in West Asheville?

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

Rob: Were there some things that were happening here having to do with people's land or employee-employer issues or the way things were developing locally that were part of the local platform of the States Rights party.

Thomas: The main thing is taxes. And, another thing is, West Asheville is a stepchild of Asheville. We're considered just a stepchild. They never considered us as Asheville. You look out here, there's more potholes in Mitchell Avenue than there is in

the rest of Asheville all together. Try to find a sidewalk on Mitchell Avenue. And it's one of the most travelled avenues anywhere over in the city. There's more traffic on this Mitchell Avenue than any thoroughfare. I've never asked City Hall for anything because I don't care anything about City Hall, but I have an awful lot of good friends over there. Coke Candler was a good friend of mine. I could go to Coke and get anything done I wanted. Old Man Gash, who was Justice of the Peace down there for years, he was a good friend. Now, he's another good Independent Democrat. He was a Democrat according to them all over there, though. Mr. Gash and his son is a judge now. They're a nice family, a grand family. I don't know how his son is, but the old man was just A-1.

Rob: So West Asheville was looking for a party to represent them counter the dominant downtown party.

Thomas: That's right.

Sally: The other thing I'm wondering about, where were these liberal organizations that you were concerned about? Were they mainly in Asheville or were they over here in West Asheville?

Thomas: Well, they were mainly in Asheville.

Sally: What were they?

Thomas: You know, it's a vote control that they have down there. They can control those votes. The colored people, you can just figure on them voting in one way--city hall in a block. And they catered to them. You go there and you'll find sidewalks eight and twelve feet wide over there in their part of the town. You won't find a pothole in one of their pavements anymore now. Just drive over there where the old depot used to be, go up through those streets there--beautiful places. Well, I'm for them, I'm for them, but why can't we get a few things like that over here?

Rob: It sounds like there's a little bit of an inheritance from Reconstruction times.

Thomas: That's right. I think it is. We're going through a process like Reconstruction right now.

Rob: In West Asheville?

Thomas: All over the United States. It's happening in California. There's Old Dellum out there, representative from California. He's black. He belongs to every organizaion that the Communists I think have in this country. And Old Tom Foley up there put him on the Committee of Intelligence, one of the committees that gets all the secrets, military and otherwise. Put a man on like that, what else can you expect? Every leak's

from right on back to where he leaked. During President Reagan's administration, there was always a hollering about leaks.

Rob: That's fascinating. Someone should definitely come and speak with you about what you know about state and national politics because you have an incredible background there as well. Let's jump. I don't think last time we got an opportunity to talk about the water tower. What role did the water tower play? Was that before the time that water was piped in here? Why did we need the water tower?

Thomas: They couldn't handle it, I believe, from over there.

Rob: The pumping station wasn't strong enough?

Thomas: Yes, the pumping station. In fact, they used two systems. Those big plants down there, some of them had their own--Chesterfield Mills and all those people down there had their own pumping stations in there.

Rob: Where did they draw their water from?

Thomas: I believe it was from the same supply that the city gets theirs, piped in together.

Rob: Who owned the supply?

Thomas: I couldn't tell you. I believe it was a private concern that would send their bills out at that time for West Asheville.

Rob: Well, you're a pharmacist. Do you have any opinions about the quality of the water, and what it was, and how it's changed, and whether the Sulphur Springs was a real bona fide source of health-giving water?

Thomas: I'll tell you my opinion of it. I haven't taken a drink of water from city water in over fifty years. I buy bottled water and I boil it.

Rob: Why is that?

Thomas: I don't like too much minerals and things in my water. Water is easy to be contaminated. And we don't hear about it until it's too late. So I buy bottled water and then boil it. All the water I have, every drop of it is boiled water.

Rob: What were you drinking in the 1930s?

Thomas: I guess I drink in the cafes and places like that, I'd have to drink a little bit. But usually I drink coffee.

Rob: So, from the time you first came here, you were concerned

about the water?

Thomas: Oh, yes.

Rob: What about Sulphur Springs.

Thomas: Sulphur Springs? Well, I was raised on sulphur water. It and alkalide water.

Rob: People used to go down and get that water for their health.

Thomas: Oh, yes. It's a healthy water.

Rob: Why did people stop getting that water? Did they stop believing in its healthful propeerties?

Thomas: No. The tourists would come in there for their health. Asheville was a health resort, and I wish to God it had stayed that way. People with tuberculosis would come here for treatments. People came from all over the United States just for that reason. And as long as we didn't build cuts through the mountains to let the smog in, we had good healthy air, we had plenty of foliage over here to give us plenty of oxygen. We didn't have the cars running through our yards, having carbon monoxide as dessert. I tell you, it was a lot healthier back then.

Sally: One of the things we've heard is that there were springs that people used to go to around here, carry their bottles and go and get the water and bring it back to their houses and drink that because they felt that was healthy. Do you know about that?

Thomas: Burger King right here is setting on three of the best little springs anywhere in the country. That was a piece of ground set back back there. A family gave it to West Asheville to be used as a park. Well, Mr. Colman, who's a very good man. In fact, I sure admire him and the work he's done for West Asheville; I don't think anyone has ever done more than Colman has for West Asheville. He's built some of the nicest places, and keeps them up. He makes it look good everywhere he goes. And his daddy before him was a real estate man. He lived out at Beaver Lake. I've been by his house going up to Bob Reynolds' a lot of times. Somehow--it's politics, possibly, but it's one of the best things that's ever happened to West Asheville, it was when Colman got that piece of ground where the post office is down here now, and that Burger King and all. Because he keeps his property up. You don't see it run down like mine now because I've had to sit by my little wife's bed and take care of her for eleven years and I had to let mine run down. And it's hurt me a lot. But ~~Colman~~ R.L. Coleman, by George, anything he does, he does it right.

Rob: What were some of his projects?

Thomas: Oh, this development back here all the way up to Haywood Road on this side up to Balsam, all those houses in there, that's Colman's development.

Rob: Does that development have a name?

OR: West Terrace Apartments ~~and Town~~...

Thomas: All of those business places down here where the Green Stamp was, all those hardware places, Post Office Building.

OR: And they've got a beauty school in there now, Alpha Beauty School. There's just several new office buildings in there.

Rob: Is Mr. Colman still living?

Thomas: Oh, yes, the son. The old gent passed away. His son's still alive. He's the one who's doing it.

Rob: How old is the son?

Thomas: I couldn't tell you that.

Rob: Is he in his seventies?

Thomas: He's old enough to vote, I know.

Sally: We know that matters to you. I want to go back to the springs. When they built the Burger King, what happened to the springs?

Thomas: They filled it in over it.

Rob: Was there any outrage over that?

Thomas: Oh, no. It was all covered up, like the springs.

Rob: Mr. Colman sold Burger King the property?

Thomas: He bought all the property up he could. I think he got that from the city some way.

Rob: He sold that property to Burger King?

Thomas: I think Burger King must be leasing it, I'm not sure. He could have. I don't know their dealings there. But he's the one that developed all that in there.

Rob: Who was it that wanted to turn it into a park?

Thomas: It was given to the City of Asheville to be made a park

of.

Rob: And when the city sold it to Colman, those restrictions didn't stay on the deed?

Thomas: I don't know what happened over there. I wished I did. I'd do some of it myself.

Rob: The leading political figures at that time, we hear, were people from West Asheville--Weldon Weir and Gay Green. Are they West Ashevillians?

Thomas: Weldon I don't believe was. Weldon--my wife worked for him, but I'll be darned if I know whether he was or not. She worked for him all the time down there.

Rob: Was that her political involvement, her working for him?

Thomas: That's where she started most of it, yes. She was working for me with I. Beverly Lake and J. Strom Thurmond and George Wallace.

Rob: Weldon Weir was in power for about fifteen years. Did he favor Asheville or did he do things for West Asheville?

Thomas: He was a good politician. I believe we got a little bit more when Weldon Weir was in there than anybody else.

Sally: Do you think that's because of you wife's involvement, too?

Thomas: No, I don't think so. I don't think he was influenced too much. But there's other folks in there. You take Coke Candler now. He had a lot to do with things happening in that courthouse down there.

Rob: What did Mrs. Young do for Weldon Weir?

Thomas: She worked when he was running for office.

Sally: May I ask some questions about the beauty shop and your cosmetic business?

Thomas: I had that over on Annendale and Charlotte. I had that building there.

Sally: What did you make?

Thomas: We named in Yarle. Young was the first "Y." "Arle" was for Arlene, and our combination was our trademark. And it was getting it registered at the patent office, I used the French pronunciation, Yarl . We were having it copyrighted and Yardley

of London, England, after I had just got it started good--I had everything going all the way up to the Tennessee line and in some places over into Tennessee with it. I had it going good in all the drug stores. I had a beautiful package set up for the shampoos and hair tonics and night creams and all these things. We had our own lipsticks. I formulated it all. And they sued us, or said they would if we continued on it. They said it was too close to their name. We hadn't given it a thought that way until they brought that up because it was our names combined.

Rob: Did you get the trademark registered?

Thomas: No. They wouldn't register it on account of the suit. So I threw up my hands, said, "okay." Then Old Davis, the bank failure Davis--he was head of the bank that failed and caused so much trouble here, people lost all their money--he found out I was doing pretty good down there with it so he asked me to make him up some of those things. I made him up a few of the barber supplies and gave him formulated on it.

Sally: How did you make those up? Did you make them up of chemicals or natural things? How did you decide?

Thomas: Oh, I just made my own formulas up. I got chemicals. I got whale wax and all those things, had them shipped in. I got an alcohol permit. I had cosmetic alcohol--95%--denatured, but it was just bitter, that's all.

Sally: You know all the stuff they have on the sides of the bottles that tells you everything that's inside, and you look at it and you think, "I don't want to put this on my face." If they were making up things about what your cosmetics were made of, what would they put on there?

Thomas: I had a regular ledger. It had all my formulas put in it. At that time, it didn't require labeling the ingredients at all. I got cetum--whale wax--and olic acid and oil of sweet almond. I made a lot of the creams myself. I worked all night long making them up and go out all day long like Mr. Handte. I put them on consignment in barber shops, drug stores. I had a beautiful shampoo. It was going good. It had a gold leaf label on it on a little square bottle. And then hair oil for barber shops. Rose oil was the big go then, and it was nothing but mineral oil, the lightest grade, and rose perfume. I got all my perfumes from Mac... It's out of Boston, I believe. I had contact with all those big manufacturing companies. Abbot Laboratories--I had a scalp ointment for dandruff. I still have tubes of that somewhere down the stairs. I looked all over for it yesterday.

Rob: You still have some of the samples of the products that you made?

Thomas: That's what we were looking for yesterday.

Rob: I was wondering if you might be able to spare even one of those samples to become part of our West Asheville or West Buncombe museum.

Thomas: I'd give you the whole thing. I couldn't sell it now.

Rob: How about Mr. Handte's peanut butter jars--do you think you might be able to find one of them?

Thomas: No, I wished I had one myself.

Rob: Where did you compound these cosmetics?

Thomas: I rented that building on the corner of Annendale and Charlotte. I had my laboratory there.

Rob: Do you have any of the equipment still?

Thomas: You see my daddy was a doctor in Arkansas, and I ran a bacterioligical laboratory there. I had the only one in the county. And then the wife being a beauty manager, we got together on this cosmetic business, and she'd tell me what women would like best and what would be the best, and I'd formulate it for her.

Sally: I would like to find out what women liked best. What did she tell you about what women really wanted back then?

Thomas: They liked those liquefying type lipsticks, ones that are not greasy, but always looked moist.

Rob: What ever happened to the chickens? Why did and everyone stop raising chickens?

Thomas: The durn city over there. They put an order in that you couldn't have any more chickens and ducks.

Rob: Do you recall when that was?

Thomas: That was about 1940, wasn't it?

Ollie: Probably was. It was in the 40s.

Rob: Before the war.

Sally: So you couldn't have any chickens and ducks during the war?

Thomas: Not during the war, no. ~~Was~~ WHEN I was gone, nobody would be

here to take care of the chickens anyway.

Rob: Was there a grandfather clause, though, if you already had them, you could keep them for a while longer?

Thomas: They allowed them so long to get rid of them. Old Man Ball, who joins my place back there--in fact, part of my land back there I bought off of--Grastey got the Ball place, and part of that land back there belongs to the old Ball farm. He had a little wood shack store on Haywood Road. That's where that milk stand is. Then they've got that monstrosity, gun shop or whatever it is there. And then they've got the cowboys' bar and all these wonderful places. We appreciate it. Anyway, Old Man Ball was very much like Mr. Harper down here. He's a wonderful old man. I'd go up and talk with him up at that store, and we had a lot of good long old-time chats. But, he'd raise his corn right back here all through my place even. He had that all in corn, and his wife passed away with cancer. He still ran the store. They were thinking that she would pass away before he would. But, I saw the old man out there. He'd be hoeing that corn and the poor old fellow would have a pain, I guess, and he'd lean on his hoe) and I told the wife, "Honey, i wouldn't be surprised if that old gentleman would go before his wife does." And so it happened that he did. Then the Grasteys took the place over, and they sold pieces of it off. I bought land from Grastey and added onto mine back here. The old house still stands there. Ball's old house, it's one of the oldest houses around here.

Rob: Let me suggest that we wrap up now. Let's go around and take some photographs. Let's also set a time to come back and look at your documents and choose. Well, thank you very much--another fascinating afternoon.

Out of the Past

Photographs of Old Marceline

Late 19th Century dress is evident in this family portrait of the Popes, whose descendants live southeast of Marceline. Standing are Bess, Bill and Iva (at right); Lon is holding baby Goldie and sitting next to Lizzie. Seated at right is Ben, born 1894, who is the father of several Popes living in rural Marceline.

Photo courtesy of Chesley Pope.

Marceline
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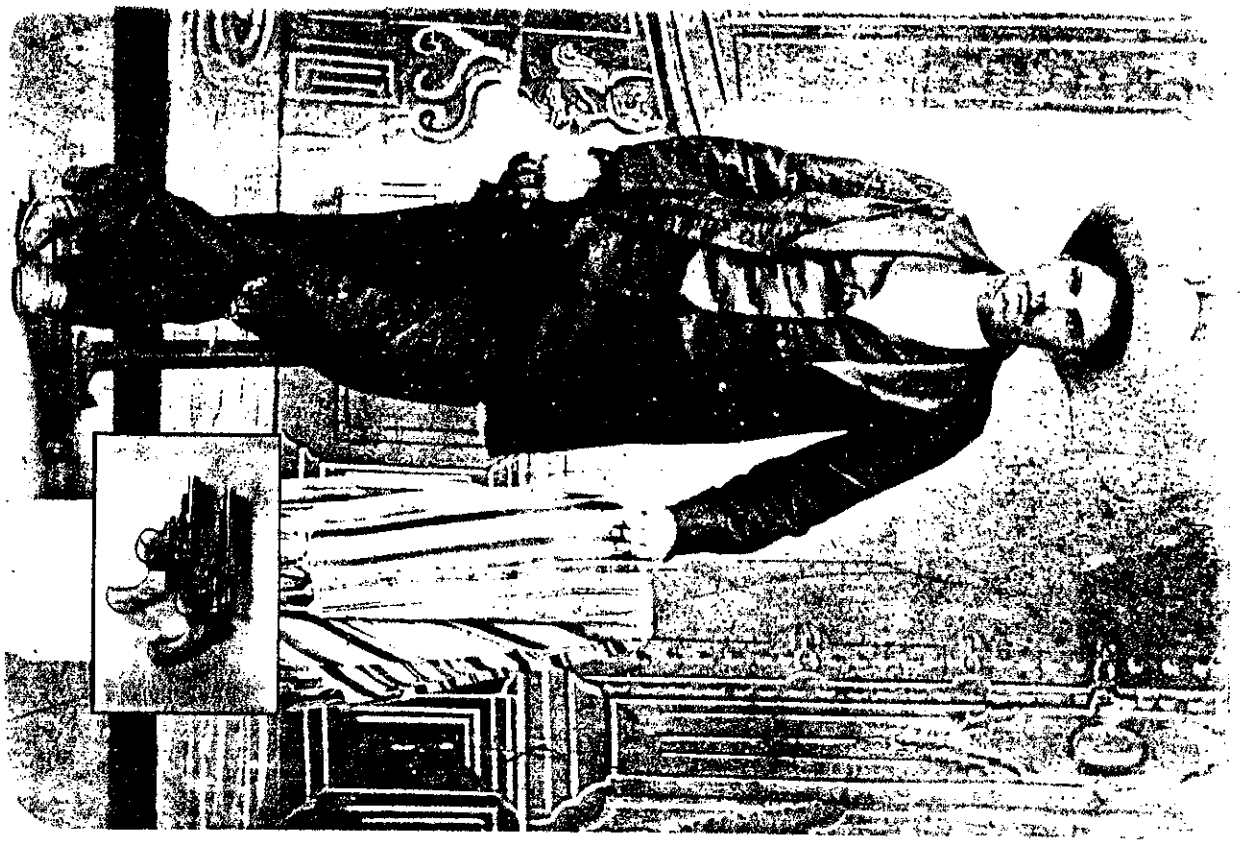
1888 - 1988

is will be a regular feature. If you have any pictures of old Marceline please b
em to The Marceline Press office.



JOHN WESLEY HARDIN
1853-1895

The most notorious of the Texas gunfighters who supposedly killed 40 men in gunfights. After serving 15 years in prison, he became a lawyer in El Paso. It was in the Acme Saloon in El Paso where Constable John Selman killed Hardin. Hardin is pictured at 18 years old in Abilene, Tx. with the Colt pistols belonging to him at death. (Photo courtesy Joe Hardin Clements) 14a

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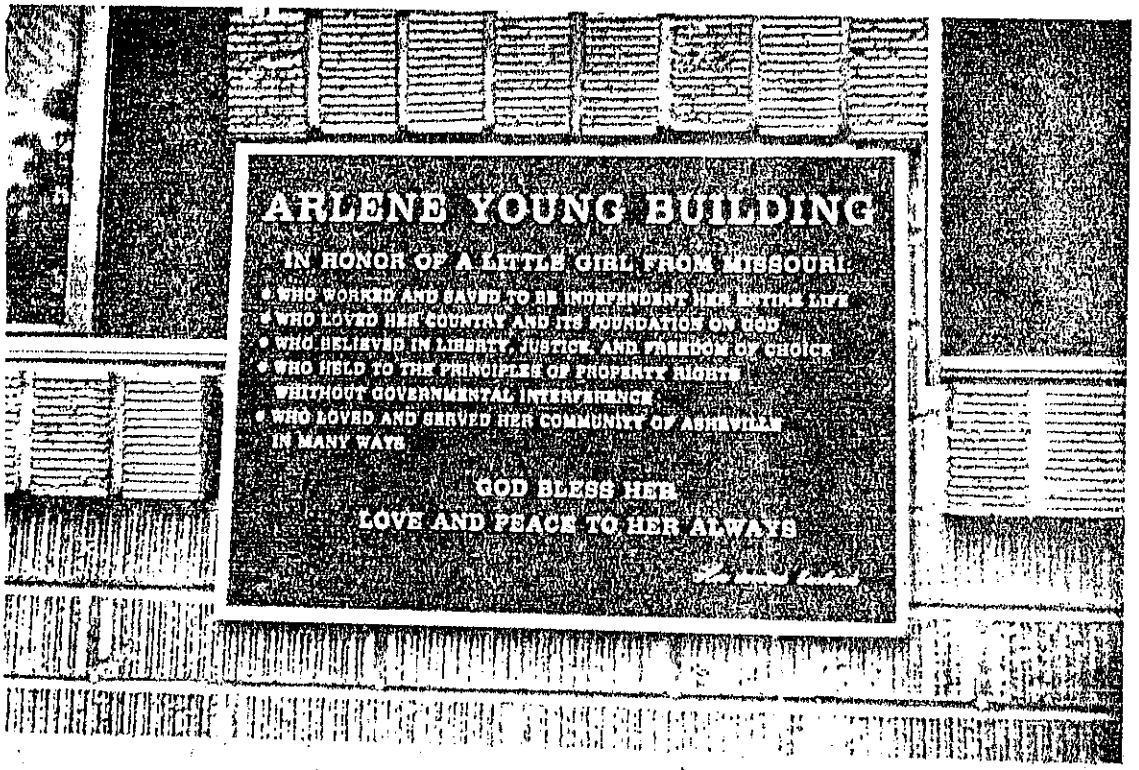
ARLENE YOUNG BUILDING
IN HONOR OF A LITTLE GIRL FROM MISSOURI
• WHO WORKED AND SAVED TO BE INDEPENDENT HER ENTIRE LIFE
• WHO LOVED HER COUNTRY AND ITS FOUNDATION ON GOD
• WHO BELIEVED IN LIBERTY, JUSTICE, AND FREEDOM OF CHOICE
• WHO HELD TO THE PRINCIPLES OF PROPERTY RIGHTS
WITHOUT GOVERNMENTAL INTERFERENCE
• WHO LOVED AND SERVED HER COMMUNITY OF ASHEVILLE
IN MANY WAYS
GOD BLESS HER
LOVE AND PEACE TO HER ALWAYS

—Citizen Photo

NEW OFFICERS of the West Asheville Business Association were elected last night at the annual association dinner in the West Asheville Masonic Temple. They are (L to R), first row: Frank Barnard, assistant secretary-treasurer; Mrs. Arlene Young, secretary-treasurer; Troy White, vice president; L. A. Fortune, president. Second row: John L. Lawrence, Floyd V. Miller, F. Jack Cole and Paul A. Nichols, new directors. Not present were Directors Bert Starnes and Jack Wall. Directors were elected in the November association meeting and officers were nominated last night by the new board.

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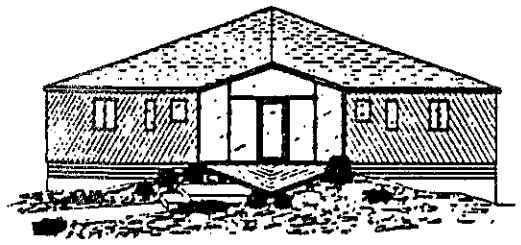

Lloyd M. Sigman
ATTORNEY AT LAW

April 7, 1992

Thomas F. Young
32 Mitchell Avenue
Asheville, NC 28806

Dear Mr. Young:

Thank you for allowing me the pleasure of reading your oral history. I learned more about West Asheville in those 41 pages than I have from living here the past 17 years.

I found only one statement that might create liability for slander. At the bottom of the first page you said Pete Vines pulled a gun on a policeman. Unless you saw it, heard him admit it, or he was convicted of it, your statement might be considered slanderous. You can remove any liability threat by rewording the statement to say that you heard or people said he pulled a gun on a policeman.

Otherwise, your statements are legally acceptable. I am returning my copy and attachments, as I have no need to keep them.

Sincerely,

Lloyd M. Sigman

LMS/ bjj

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